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LETTER DATED 19 NOVEMBER 1998 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ERITREA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to forward the text of a press release issued on 18 November 1998 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Eritrea (see annex) and its enclosure concerning the death of Eritreans in Ethiopian internment camps.

In total disregard of all international calls to desist from violating the human rights of Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin, the Ethiopian regime continues it wanton detention and mass expulsion of people of Eritrean origin, as well as the expropriation of their property. The deaths of the three Eritrean youths in detention, as described in the press release, are a logical outcome of the inhumane treatment of the detained victims, and more such deaths may be expected to follow. The need for the international community to act as a matter of urgency to avert such a human disaster cannot thus be overemphasized.

I should be grateful if you would kindly circulate the text of the present letter and its annex as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Haile MENKERIOS
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

Annex

Press release issued on 18 November 1998 by the
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Eritrea

Three Eritreans die in Ethiopian detention camps; massive deportations continue

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has informed the Government of Eritrea about the deaths of three young Eritreans while in detention in Ethiopia. The three youths had been in detention for over four months and died in the notorious, malaria-infested Bilate concentration camp, in south-west Ethiopia. The Eritrean Government has notified the families of the deceased and expressed its condolences to them.

The three Eritreans are Gebrekidan Zekaria Teklemariam, a university student who was studying in Ethiopia on an exchange programme between the two countries; civilian internee Dawit Tewolde Gufar; and prisoner of war Said Sahada Ahmed.

The Ethiopian Government claims that the Eritreans died due to illness, "two on the same day, on 7 October, and the third on 13 October", but has waited for one month to furnish ICRC with photocopies of death certificates to match notifications for two of the deceased. ICRC has still not received the certificate for the third Eritrean.

The Government of Eritrea condemns the death under illegal and inhuman detention of three of its nationals. It calls for an independent investigation into the causes of, and circumstances surrounding, their deaths. Eritrea also calls for the immediate release of the 1,500 civilians, including 37 university exchange students, who have now spent over five months in prison. They were imprisoned by the Ethiopian Government en masse, illegally and without due process of law.

Meanwhile, Ethiopia continues with impunity its massive deportation of Eritreans and of Ethiopians of Eritrean origin. The number of deportees has now reached over 35,000. They were picked up from their homes in the middle of the night, taken to prisons under armed guard where they were held for periods ranging from a few days to four months and then boarded on buses which dumped them on the front lines on the border. The deportations have resulted in the massive separation of families and large-scale confiscation of their property.

The Government of Eritrea once again calls upon the Organization of African Unity, the United Nations, the United States of America and the European Union as well as the international community at large to ensure that Ethiopia:

- Respects the international laws, covenants and charters on human rights to which it is a signatory;

- Stops the gross violation of the human rights of the Eritrean population in Ethiopia;

- Ends the illegal deportation of Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin; and

- Releases immediately the more than 1,500 Eritrean youths who have spent over five months in illegal and inhuman detention.

Enclosure

The delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Eritrea presents its compliments to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Eritrea and has the obligation to transmit with its sincere regrets the following information which is based on article 120 of the Third Geneva Convention and articles 126 to 130 of the Fourth Geneva Convention as well as related dispositions:

NOTIFICATION OF DEATH

1. Prisoner of war ETA 400240

Name: Said Sahada Ahmed

Name of father: Sahada Ahmed

Name of mother: Halima Ali

Place and date of birth: G. Atele, 1970

Place and date of death: Yirga Alem Hospital, 7 October 1998

Rank and service No.: Soldier, National Service, Mil. No. 2001.3

Address of next of kin: Sahada Ahmed, Guinda Street, Atele

Where and when taken prisoner: Zala Ambeasa, 30 June 1998

Cause and circumstances of death: Malignant tumour with bleeding

2. Civilian internee ETA 20441

Name: Gebrekidan Zekaria Teklemariam (university student under the exchange programme)

Name of father: Zekaria Teklemariam

Name of mother: Askalu Misgina Kahsu

Place and date of birth: Harmasen, 1964

Place and date of death: Yirga Alem Hospital, 7 October 1998

Address of next of kin: Malake Sereke, Asmara

Place and date of arrest: 13 June 1998, Addis Ababa

Cause and circumstances of death: Inflammatory bowel disease

ICRC attaches herewith copies of the death certificates for the two above-mentioned persons issued by the relevant authorities. The originals of the death certificates are requested and will be transmitted as soon as possible. Furthermore, ICRC is in the process of following up with the Ethiopian authorities regarding the place of burial, the personal effects and any other information not yet included.

The Yirga Alem Hospital informed ICRC on 13 October 1998 of the death of a third person, Mr. Dawit Tewolde Gufar, a civilian internee not under the university exchange programme who had been arrested on 18 June 1998, and registered under the number ETA 31193 in the Bilate internment camp. ICRC is awaiting the death certificate and will transmit it with all necessary information upon receipt.

Regretting once again to have the sad duty to transmit this information, ICRC expresses its wish that the families of the deceased persons be informed as soon as possible as to the fate of their next of kin.

Ville, 10 November 1998